

The Power Of Giving Thanks

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In 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln established the last Thursday in November as an official holiday in the United States, he never envisioned that the consumption of turkey and pumpkin pie would become the main focus. Instead, his intention for establishing Thanksgiving was clearly stated in his national proclamation:

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that God should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November as a day of Thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father Who dwelleth in the heavens.

Lincoln was a wise man who recognized the danger inherent in becoming an ungrateful nation. His wisdom is borne out in the following scripture which clearly points to unthankful hearts as a sign of spiritual deterioration in society.

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy... (2 Timothy 3:1-2 NASB)

This scripture places the attribute "ungrateful" in a long list of sinful traits that will be displayed by people in the "endtimes." It also reveals both God's displeasure with the sin of ungratefulness and the fact that it will be a sign of the corporate spiritual decline of society as the last days approach.

For an individual, the path to an ungrateful heart begins with complaining. The word "complain" means "to express displeasure or unhappiness about something; to find fault; or to make an accusation." Have you ever observed people who have a hard time talking without complaining about something? This habit of grumbling about circumstances and other people is a reflection of their heart condition. Jesus said, ***"...out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks."*** (Matt. 12:34)

A monk joined a monastery and took a vow of silence. After the first ten years his superior called him in and asked, "Is there anything you want to say?" The monk replied, "Food bad." After another 10 years passed, the monk had another

opportunity to express his thoughts. He said, "Bed hard." Another 10 years went by and he was again called in to appear before his superior. When asked if he had anything to say, he replied, "I quit!" His superior shook his head and said, "It doesn't surprise me one bit. You've done nothing but complain since you got here!"

Many people spend their whole lives complaining about what they don't have rather than giving thanks for the good things that God has given them. The Bible is very clear in exhorting us to avoid complaining.

Do all things without grumbling and faultfinding and complaining...
(Philippians 2:14 Amplified Bible) ***In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*** (I Thess. 5:18 NASB)

Complaining will quench a grateful heart and giving thanks will chase away that ugly spirit of complaining. God would have us choose the latter course of action on a daily basis! A thankful heart can always see something to be thankful for in every situation. A person who constantly complains about his job or his boss should consider the jobless person who would be grateful to be employed! And so it is true about every condition in our lives. Keeping a proper perspective will help you to appreciate and give thanks in every situation.

Scottish minister Alexander Whyte was known for his uplifting prayers in the pulpit. He always found something for which to be grateful. One Sunday morning the weather was so cold, miserable and gloomy that one church member thought to himself, "Certainly the preacher can't think of anything for which to thank the Lord on a wretched day like this." Much to his surprise, however, Whyte began praying, "We thank Thee, O God, that it is not always like this!" God wants us to cultivate a perspective of gratitude at all times.

Are you aware that giving thanks is God's anti-anxiety prescription? Anti-anxiety medication is one of the most prescribed pharmaceuticals in the United States. Many millions of dollars are spent on anti-anxiety pills each year. Yet the Bible gives a clearly stated (and free!) prescription for the relief of anxiety:

Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:6-7 NASB)

Thanksgiving is powerful – it releases the peace of God to your heart. It is vital that we utilize God's anti-anxiety prescription. When you are tempted to give into fearful, worrisome or anxious thoughts, PRAY but do so with thanksgiving. This means to speak to God by giving thanks for the past answers to prayer, miraculous interventions, deliverances and provisions He has made in your life as well as His promises in the Word. This very act of thankfulness will build up your faith as you recall God's faithfulness to you. And it will drive back anxiety and fear because genuine gratitude to God and anxiety cannot cohabit simultaneously in your heart.

We live in an age when complaining comes more naturally to people than expressing thanks. In order to overcome that tendency, We will have to pursue the cultivation of a grateful spirit in our lives with purposeful effort. Make it a choice of your will every day to look for things and people for which you can give thanks. It is important to express your thanks to God as well as to others.

A university professor once pondered the many “unthanked” people in his life. He decided to write letters to each one of them. This act brought amazing results not only to his own heart, but also to those to whom he had written to express his thanks. One elderly schoolteacher who had influenced him greatly as a child wrote back to tell him that in 50 years of teaching, his was the only letter of thanks she had ever received. It had touched her deeply.

Practice giving thanks by expressing your thanks verbally to others, in writing, in prayer and with your actions. If you have small children, start a practice of having each family member express thanks for something or someone each night before they go to bed. Establishing a lifelong habit of giving thanks daily will yield powerful results.

Cultivating a grateful heart will help you cure a habit of complaining, protect you from discouragement, guard your heart from anxiety, and help you mature spiritually. It will enrich your life. So don't go to sleep tonight without taking time to give thanks!

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